

SELF PUBLISHER!

★ MAGAZINE ★

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OF AWESOME!**

**EARTH
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ISSUE

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FREE PDF VERSION

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SELF PUBLISHER! MAGAZINE

It's amazing how much can happen between issues, even when it seems like we never actually stop between them. The process of keeping all this going is a roller coaster. Thrilling, fun, and sometimes scary. For the past few months, I have been getting worried and wary of trends I've been seeing and wondering if we'd be able to keep this zine going in this form. As a last resort, I ran a Kickstarter to try to get us over the hump of being almost due to pay for our web hosting things, getting some software we needed to upgrade, and getting the printing service in place for handling POD subscriptions for the magazine. And it worked! And so, as a result, we can all rest assured that, at least through 2014, Self Publisher! Magazine is going to continue to work hard to get as many people checking out as many indie creators as we can. So, I'd like to make a genuine and heartfelt shout out to the supporters who have restored my determination to make SP! work. My goal for next year will be to not have to beg for support anymore.

So, with no further ado, I would like to welcome you to this issue, which is taking a special look at a really cool project. Miguel Guerra wanted to do something for Earth Day, and came up with a project called Earth Dream. I am really happy to be able to help let people know all about it, as there is nothing more important than this planet we live on. Without it, there is nothing. So please, take the time to care, and check this out.

We also have to take a moment to welcome back Jay Savage to the magazine. Jay came to me about a week ago as I write this, letting me know that his situation had improved, and he was ready to return to SP! with some new ideas and knowledge he's learned through working at another magazine. Considering the amount of time it takes ME to do layouts that aren't as good as his, I personally welcome him back hugely... I hope you all will too.

So, we've got John Orlando, Jim Scott, Mark Egan, an article on Accent UK, an exclusive Cloud 9 Comics Sneak Peek, articles by our regulars, and more. Go forth and enjoy it all; then tell your friends all about it! Spreading the word about SP! Magazine is the greatest way you can help make everything worth it for everyone. Look forward to next month as well, when we have Brian Canini, James Lyle, a band feature on Red Hot Rebellion, and more! See you then.

- Ian Shires



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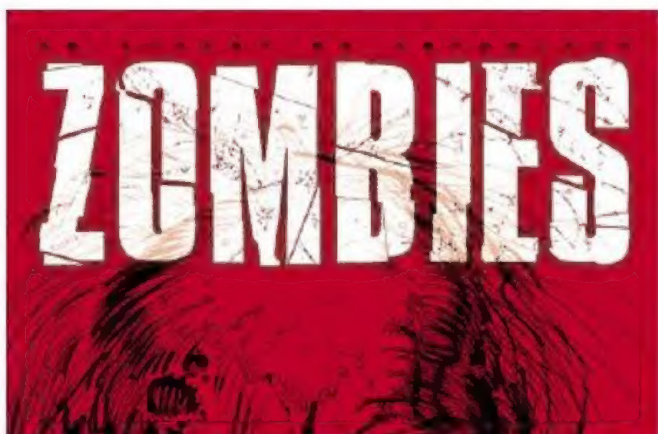
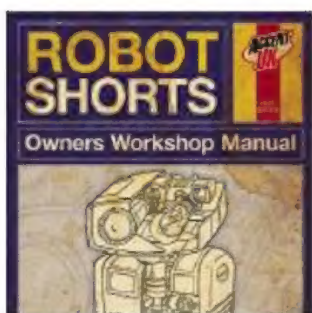
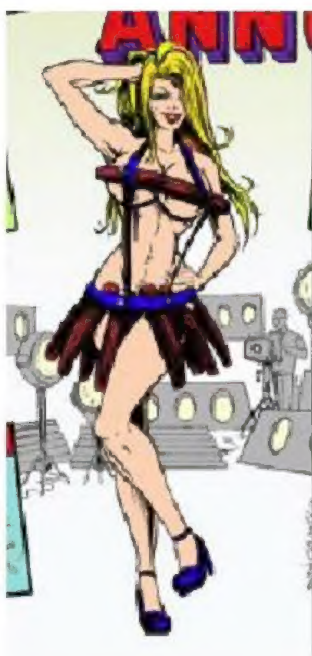
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Miguel Guerra

By Ian Shires

SP: Before we dig into the meat of your *Earth Dream* project, let's get to know you a bit. Where are you from? What were you like growing up?

MG: Wow, where to begin? My hometown? I was born in Madrid. My father was in the US Air Force and stationed in Spain, where he met my mother, had my older brother, then me. When I was eight, we all moved to Canada, where I did most of my growing up. While in university, I met my wonderful partner-in-crime and co-writer Suzy Dias, and we tied the knot soon after.

SP: So, when did that spark for making comics hit you?

I was fortunate to grow up with many different influences, from the slapstick-style Spanish comics to the US comic books I would get from the military base from my dad. At the time, anime—like *Mazinger Z*—was all the rage, so I was exposed to a lot. Changing styles comes very naturally to me.

Making my own comics was a eureka moment. Like many, while a teen, I dabbled with creating comics, but my dream was to break into the Big Two (Marvel and DC). It didn't occur to me that I could just do my own comic, until a friend of mine from Japan looked at a *Black Widow* submission I had on my desk and asked if it was my character. A

light bulb went off. Funny how the simplest things can stare you in the face, yet they don't occur to you. The comic creation beast escaped from deep within me. I created my first comic and shopped it around, but received the standard responses. I then got freelance work with Antarctic Press (*Gold Digger Swimsuit Special* and then a short story to their *NHS Special*). Nothing big, but a start. Suzy and I decided we needed to take the plunge and move from Toronto to New York City.

SP: Give us some background on where your path to self publishing has led. What work did you do before starting 7 Robots?

In 2005, we jumped in headfirst and created Iberian Press to publish our own work. By 2006, we had released *Samurai Elf* Vol. 1, a sci-fi/fantasy series that follows an unwilling hero as he witnesses the massive failures that plunge his world into a global war. I was carried by Diamond Distributors and debuted at SDCC. We now have the series available on our site for free <http://www.7robots.com/shop/>.

In 2007, we released *Alric the Wild*, a fun all-ages comic book about a boy raised by a two-headed she-wolf. Alric thinks he's a wolf (and humans are silly) and wants to be a mighty hero. We want to use Alric's random encounters

to expose kids to historical figures. This initial comic is the first part of a graphic novel to be published with 7 Robots, Inc.

In 2008, we released *Samurai Elf* Vol. 2, also carried by Diamond Distributors. We were going to debut it at that year's SDCC, but then life kicked us all in the teeth. That same year, my brother was diagnosed with advanced cancer and he was uninsured. I cancelled my trip and table at the SDCC (they were not pleased) and gave the money to him. The irony was that he lived in San Diego and I had been looking forward to seeing him. In the end, he managed to receive treatment and recuperated. From that dark period, *Super Corporate Heroes* was born: a dark, satirical look at the modern world...with superheroes. But this series is published under 7 Robots, Inc., so more on that later.

SP: 7 Robots is your company with your wife. Tell us more about how it came about, and what it's like working that closely with your significant other.

Suzy and I decided to incorporate and create a company that covered self-publishing and more—something to match our entrepreneurial spirit. We want 7 Robots to be an imaginarium. Whatever we think of, we can sell. Everything from comics to custom toys to commission art.



Miguel Guerra & Maria Diaz

Luckily, working with Suzy is great. Sometimes it's like we have one brain (cue the spooky sci fi music). We bounce ideas off each and they take on lives of their own. I couldn't ask for a better writing partner. We joke that we "bebop" or improvise a lot. Once the plots are hammered out, Suzy tackles the scripts and lettering, as well as our websites. I do all the pencils, inks and colors.

Sp: Tell us more about the regular work you put out, your titles, and how you reach your audience.

We use the internet heavily to promote our graphic novels. Exposure is an elusive commodity for small publishers. We make connections via Twitter, Facebook and email. Sometimes people contact us—hooray! We also try to attend comic cons to meet people.

They're fun and we always get a great response. Soon, we're going to have video updates (YouTube) with art tutorials, advice (how to copyright, trademark, market, etc) and just chat about self publishing challenges, so people can learn from our mistakes and successes.

If I can take you back to Super Corporate Heroes, the idea came about after I found out my brother was sick and uninsured. Suzy and I fleshed it out into a graphic novel series. The main idea is—if superheroes, the ultimate altruistic heroes, were 'real,' they would still need to make a living. If they got paid for their skills, then we'd inevitably pay to be rescued. Doctors, fireman, police officers, etc., all earn a salary, so why wouldn't superheroes?

Mighty Mighty Wolf Boy and His Magical Warriors (a.k.a. Alric the Wild) is an all-ages graphic novel series, with each book able to stand alone. It's a slapstick comedy set in ancient times. The main characters—Alric the Wild, the magical Monkey King, and Princess Camila the Amazon—bring hijinx, fun and highflying adventure into every story. The trio sinks Atlantis, topples the Great Wall of China, destroys the Colossus of Rhodes, gets Socrates arrested, and burns down the Library of Alexandria.

And that brings us back to Samurai Elf, the first book we ever published. We'll get working on that to finish off the last three of five volumes.

SP: Both you and your wife are very internationally-minded, I notice. I am assuming that plays a little into your views on the environment.

Yes, it does play a part in it. When you live in multiple countries, you can't be myopic. What one country does affects another, as do states and cities. At the time I grew up in Canada, the environment and recycling were discussed everywhere, from Saturday morning cartoons to Canadian science celebs like David Suzuki.



I also adhere to the 'don't piss where you sleep' philosophy. This only deepened when I started to connect with my Cherokee background. The Native American way of looking at the world is just sensible, not radical. When wanting clean water makes you an activist, it's a sad state of affairs. I'm also the father of two small children, so I don't want them growing up in a world that is even more polluted. I want to help make things better for them. It's not hard to get people need to think sensibly and see ahead to the next generation. We just need to get multi-national corporations to change their motives. Therein lies the supreme challenge.

SP: And so, that leads us into your Earth Dream project. Tell us how you got going with it and what you're hoping for from it.

This past Earth Day, I had the idea for a free digital anthology to help get people thinking about the world in a fun and thoughtful way. I believe comics are a fantastic medium to talk about big issues. They're not constrained by time or budget... if you get volunteers. The idea of it being digital only is both to keep costs down and to not use paper. Hopefully, being digital also means it'll be borderless and downloadable from anywhere in the world. My hope was to get international artists and writers to submit short stories or poems (or almost anything), since this is a planetary problem. The narratives could deal with nature (or space) in any way; it didn't have to be a story about 'the environment'. I networked with my artist friends online and the ball started rolling. I've received a great response.

The name "Earth Dream" was again inspired by Cherokee roots. The dream world for all indigenous people is important—while it's mostly ignored by our civilization. But no one can deny that analyzing your dreams brings greater understanding, and sometimes wisdom, to the waking world. For me, stories are waking dreams, making their journey from the inner world to be made 'real' or documented on paper.

My hope is that Earth Dream will be not just an anthology about the environment, but streams of voices with a myriad of different views that run into a grand river. We'll offer Earth Dream in two versions: in the original languages in which they were written, as well as translated into English.

SP: Do some name dropping! Who's involved?



It's all indie artists and writers, so I'd love to mention everyone who's fully committed:

United States: Tom and Nimue Brown (Hopeless, Maine), Ray Felix (Bronx Heroes), Anibal Arroyo (Mas Means More), Jerome Walford (Blue Griffin), Pete Hernandez III (Company Man Comic), Elaine Haywood (Cap Productions), A.M. Frasier (Exodus Publishing), Erik Neilsen (Amphibimen Comics), Tony Pabon, Shane McGee, and more.

Canada: Loren Albrecht, Cristian Aluas, John Tae and Adam Blainey. I'm also hoping Mark Oakley (Thieves and Kings, Stardrop) will join the project, if he has time.

Columbia: Luis Pereira

Puerto Rico: Rigz Jimenez (Astral).

Poland: Waldek Juszyk, Max Spajder, and Marek Rudowski

Spain: Guillermo Ros

SP: Well, this is a very interesting and exciting project, and we wish you the best for it! Tell us, where can people follow its progress?

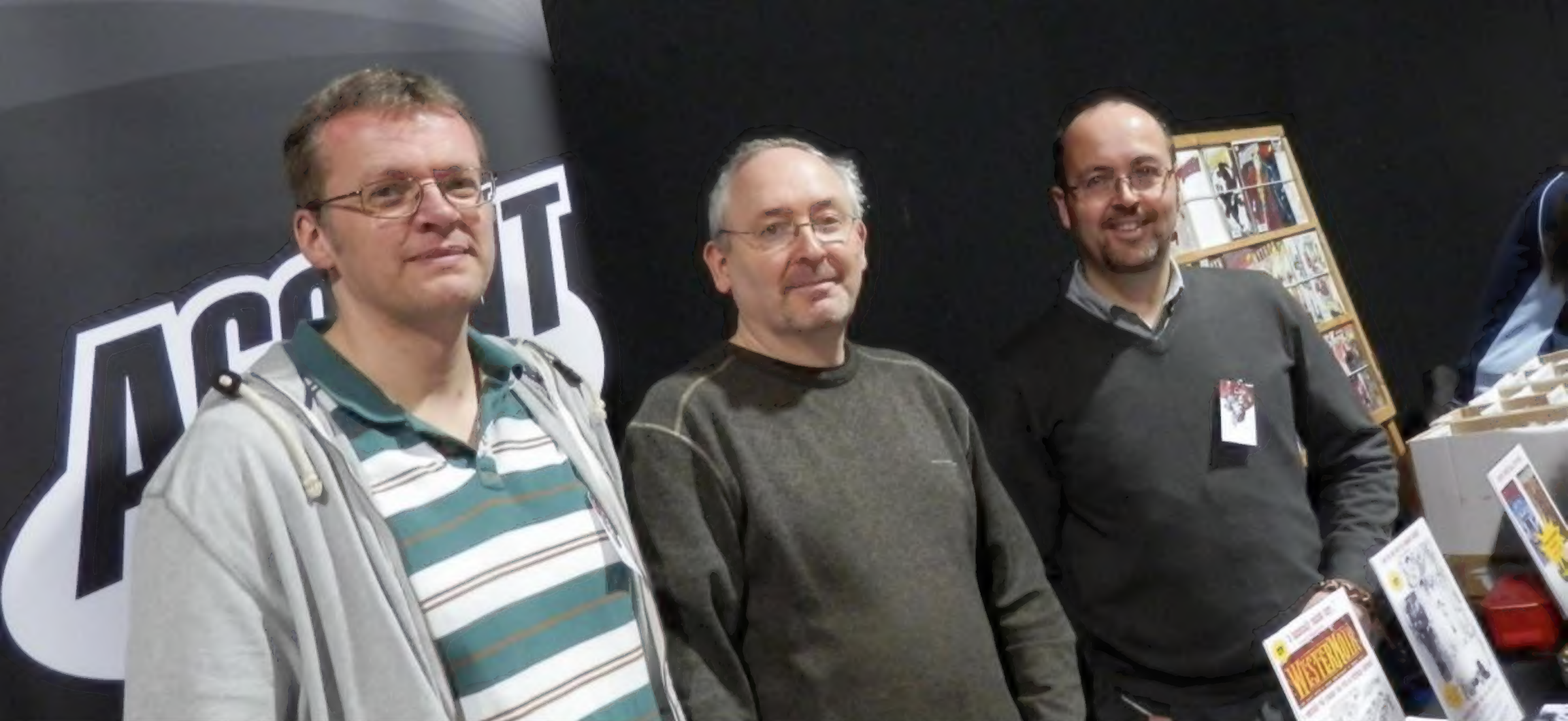
You can follow our progress on our site: <http://www.7Robots.com/earth-dream/>, on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/7robotsinc> and on Twitter @7robotsinc

SP: Great, and we're sure to do a review of it, so we'll look forward to that. Anything else you would like to add that we missed?

To see our work, stay updated and download free comics, you can visit <http://www.7robots.com/>. My portfolio is available at <http://www.miguelguerra.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/7robotsinc>, <https://www.facebook.com/Supercorporateheroes> and <https://www.facebook.com/artofguerra>

Twitter: @7RobotsInc and @SuperCorpHeroes



ACCENT U.K.

By Gary Crutchley

Edited by Paul Birch

SP! Colin Mathieson, Dave West... You two are the owners, publishers, and driving force behind Accent UK. How about you introduce yourselves and give a little history on AccentUK?

Dave: Well, I've been dabbling with making comic books for quite a while now, but it all really started to come together in 2000, when Colin and I formed Accent UK. It started as more a collective than as an outright comic publisher, but Colin and I always clicked creatively and had a shared vision of what Accent UK was about and could become.

I have a day job working in IT (I'm a data architect, if that means anything to you) and so spare time has always been a precious commodity. Fitting making comic books into your day-to-day routine is a real challenge and sometimes you have to be a little greedy. Making time for comics when you could—and probably should—be doing other things. An understanding family is key to letting this happen, but I do feel at times that I'm pushing things a bit too much and that I really need to step back a little from the whole comic thing. I guess, that's true of anything that you're passionate about, and looking at it that way can be a positive thing.

Colin: I'm originally from Scotland, but ventured south of the border to Manchester where, discovering the joys of comic shops and marts, I literally bumped into a certain Dave West who had just published the first couple of issues of his indie book, *More Than We Seem*. I was working

on my first minicomics at the time, and we soon became friends, encouraging each other's creative efforts. Egging each other on, we then took the plunge by booking a table together at one of the very early Comic Expo shows in Bristol which, at the time, was probably the only place in the UK where indies and professionals could share exhibition space.

Thankfully, the show was a modest success and great fun in meeting and sharing experiences with many other creative folks, several of whom we discovered were also from the Manchester area. This led to various pub meets and gatherings, including—rather famously—a get-together on Remembrance Day in a freezing converted Victorian Mill, where artist Barry Renshaw (of later Redeye and Comics International fame) had a studio. We agreed that we should all continue to share table space and costs and carry a common banner on our books and so, Accent UK was born. To cement our collective aim, we also all agreed to contribute strips to a new stand-alone, themed anthology. The occasion gave rise to our first release, *Remembrance Day*, which was released at the following year's Bristol show, as Accent UK announced themselves to the comics world.

SP! Thirteen years is a long time to be still in the business of publishing comic books, especially small press comic books. Lots of publishers, from small press right up to independent and mainstream companies, have not lasted as long as you two. What's your secret? Where do you get the enthusiasm to carry on publishing books today?

Colin: I think it's because we both still love comics and love being involved in their world. We're constantly amazed at where our books have taken us. We've exhibited throughout the UK, the US and of course, Denmark. We've presented at bookshop, library and museum events—most recently at the Comic Art school in Malmö—and had the joy of seeing our books accepted and distributed worldwide by Diamond, helping several of our contributors land professional gigs, and we've even had a couple of our books translated and distributed in Brazil!

Our secret has, perhaps, been not to overstretch ourselves financially, always keeping an eye on costs, so we can carry on, even if this means we don't publish as frequently or as many books as we'd like—but you really can't help but remain enthusiastic when you experience some of the events and meet some of the many talented people across the world that we have over the years; it really inspires you!

Dave: Yep, thirteen years is a long time, and yep, we've seen a lot of friends (who also happened to be competitors) come and go over the years. It's a shame that in the UK, the independent comic scene is such hard going. Producing good solid comic books actually isn't the hard bit. The hard bit is getting them in front of people. Getting them in stores has always been a struggle. Stores are always struggling to balance the books (if you'll excuse the pun) and have to respond to the latest Marvel and DC events.



Consequently, they have little cash for gambling on some independent title that nobody has heard of, from a company that sounds vaguely familiar but you can't quite place. It's all understandable, but equally, it's all disappointing.

We made some mistakes, quite early on, I'll be honest. Printing too many copies of certain books, tying up cash in stock that could not then be spent on the next book, but we have learned. I've seen so many independent publishers invest too much in their first issue and not be able to move on the second until they've sold enough of the first. Keep turning up to cons with the same book and see readers begin to switch off. It's a balancing act. The more copies you print, the lower the cost price of each issue. The more profit you have to cover the costs of convention tables, etc. But the more you print, the more you need to shift before you can afford the next print run. Yep, it was a hard lesson, and even when you think you have it in hand, you can be surprised by low

orders, particularly when the book is listed alongside a new DC initiative. But then you start getting feedback from those who do pick up your comic and it's all worthwhile. Getting people to come to your stall to pick up everything you've published since they last saw you really does make it all worthwhile. Meeting other creators and feeding off of each other's energy helps, but it's readers that really make the difference.

SP!: Why start with anthologies? I always thought these were the hardest books to put together.

Dave: And you wouldn't be wrong. The anthologies were a way of getting samples of all the emerging talent in the UK out there into stores across the globe. We never made profit on these books, they took a lot of time to pull together and edit, but they served their purpose. We received emails from people in Australia who enjoyed the books, pulling out their personal favourites.

The added problem with anthologies is that they have a small reader base. Only a small percentage of comic readers actually like anthologies. This has meant that sales are always quite low and unlikely to grow. People love them at cons, but stores are very reserved with their order numbers. We are moving away from themed anthologies and moving into concept anthologies. We won't list these as anthologies at all, as they have a single story running through them with backups and side stories provided by different creators. We'll see how that goes for a while. Who On Earth Was Thaddeus Mist is our first attempt at this and it took a lot of effort on the part of main writer and editor Owen Johnson to pull it together. More than a themed anthology, as the stories had to make sense in the wider context, as well as be entertaining in their own right.

Colin: Well, the anthologies have been great showcases for people's work and, while originally only intended for Accent UK collective creators and a few guests, they soon snowballed with contributions from all around the globe, from both emerging and established talents, such as Steve Bissette, Kieron Gillen, Frazer Irving, Leah Moore, and John Reppion. It would've been rude to turn them down, but luckily we'd started working with Andy Bloor, a talented artist and graphic designer who worked his magic on designing and formatting our books and with the UK's new comic printing dynamo, Stuart Gould, we were able to produce quality-looking books, reflecting the quality of the submissions within their 260-odd pages!

At the time of release of our first "new look" themed graphic novel, *Zombies* (2007), there was nothing else like it on the UK scene and it did very well, quickly selling out. However by the time of *Predators* (2011), there was an abundance of professionally-printed anthologies around. Some were themed, some not, but the market

was feeling swamped and it was harder to get noticed, which was working against the original showcase idea. So, as Dave says, we decided to step away from regular anthologies for a while, freeing up resources to try something else—which in itself isn't a bad thing—to stay fresh.

SP!: So, falling sales of the anthologies were never a factor in deciding to publish smaller self-contained comics, such as *The Wolfmen*; it was always the intention to branch out with a variety of different titles?

Colin: The original idea was that the anthologies would simply supplement our own regular comic titles, but the reality soon became that the anthologies were our regular output and were what we got known for!

We had always intended to release a balanced range of self-contained and ongoing titles; it's just taken us a long time to get there!

Dave: We always wanted to do both. The aim was to do an anthology every year and also to produce one or two one-shots. We perfected our anthologies through a number of attempts that only ever saw sales at UK cons, finally reaching *Zombies*, which Diamond was happy to list on Previews. Around the same time, we produced our first one-shot, *The Wolfmen*, with Andy Bloor bringing a real film noir art style to the story of London gangsters in the 1960s, with an obvious horror twist. Year on year, we produced an anthology and followed up *Wolfmen* with *The Fall Of The Wolfmen* (a sequel to *The Wolfmen*, which continued the story), and we also published a work by Martin Flink (a friend we made in Denmark at their comic cons) called *The Man Of Glass*, which is gorgeous and been very well received.

Falling demand for the anthologies, compared with steady demand for the one-shots however, meant we printed less of the later anthologies and hence, had to slightly raise the cover price. It also began to feel that we weren't delivering on our promise to creators. Due to falling retailer orders, there were fewer books out there in shops across the globe and so, we weren't delivering on our promise to get their work out there. It was a tough decision, but we decided to stop the anthologies. This gave us more time and money to invest in



one-shots and ongoing series, hopefully raising the awareness of the brand, so that one day, we may feel able to go back and give anthologies another go.

SP!: You both must have been overjoyed when Accent UK won the Eagle Award for *Whatever happened to the World's Fastest Man?* and it must have given you a tremendous boost in confidence, Dave, being the writer.

Dave: Yep. There's nothing quite like winning an award to confirm that this isn't just vanity press. We believe in our books and Colin and I both work hard shaping and choosing stories that feel right for Accent UK, but its reviews, customer feedback, and awards that tell you that you're doing something right.

Colin: It was real nice for the book's quality to be recognised and, for a brief time, at the London MCM show where the award was announced, it felt like we'd arrived, with brisk sales, signings, interviews and photos, etc. It was really quite special, and I know that Dave still gives the award a little polish now and then!

SP!: Apart from the various titles you publish under the Accent UK banner, both of you have smaller personal books that you publish. Would you care to talk about them, and why you keep them separate from the main line of titles?

Dave: I have a typical British sense of humor and have been called a little eccentric by a number of people over the years. I like to think that this is typically British too, and not just odd. I wanted to carry on telling my strange little tales in books that are

being developed in the background, with only me and maybe a more-talented artist working on it.

Andy Bloor helps as always, with hours spent tidying them up for me and designing the whole package (as he does with most of our proper books). There have been two releases so far: *Strange Times Book 1* and *Robot Shorts* (with artist Steve Holder). I do leak news about these things onto my blog every now and then, but I don't really publicize these books at all; they just kind of happen. They're not big stories, more like collections of little stories that share a link. I can bundle them together when the weight is about right and print them off as little, hardcover, A5 greyscale books. These I sell through the website or at cons and not through shops. I like them to be a little different and I'm not entirely sure that the shops would order any, even though SFX Magazine recommended that they did. At the moment, I'm working on the finishing touches to *Strange Times Book 2* (which finishes that tale) and am collaborating with artist Sebastian Velez on my version of a traditional superhero book—which is anything but traditional.

Colin: My real loves are history, comics, and adventure, and a few years ago, I brought these interests together in my *Zulu: Water Cart Rescue* miniseries which was, thankfully, well received. I've continued to work on several historical fictions and other quirky ideas since, but with both writing and illustrating myself, these are taking an age to complete and will, I think, be very different from the rest of Accent UK's lineup, so likely won't be distributed through Diamond, but only available at shows.

I'm also writing a couple of more mainstream stories for other artists to illustrate, which promise to be interesting and will

SHAURYA

THE RABHAS INCIDENT

DRAGO BENTLEY

INFINITY

WINTER CITY

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GALLOWS

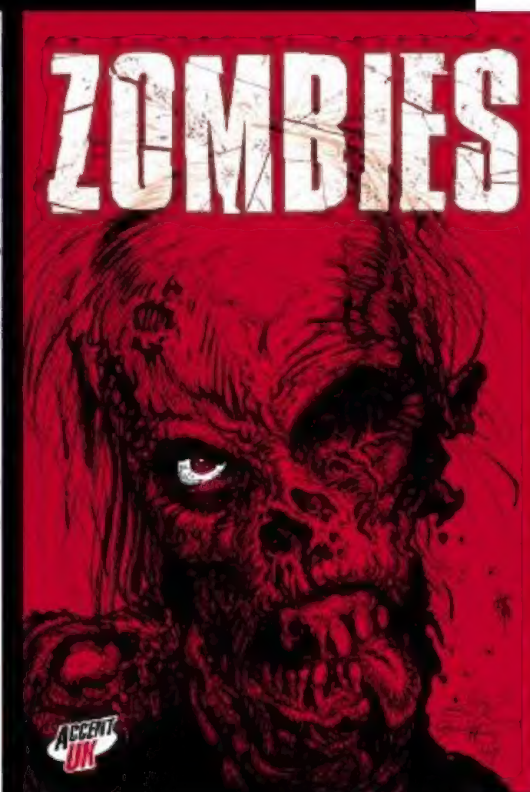
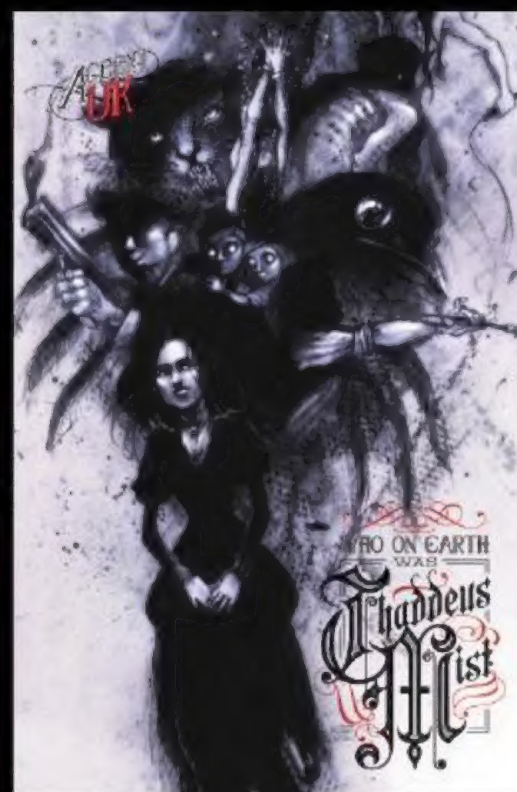
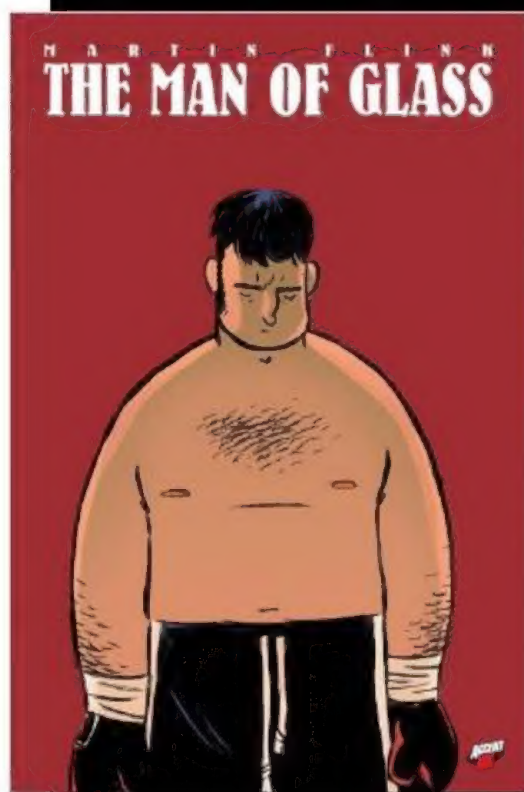
BLEK

DYNAGIRE

THE REALMSCAPE WARS

ALL NEW
CLOUD 9 COMIX
COMING SOON
FOR IOS,
ANDROID &
KINDLE FIRE

CLOUD 9
COMIX



(I hope!) be a better fit within our existing Accent UK banner, so we'll see. I'm not revealing more in case I jinx them!

SP! Do you both have defined roles in running AccentUK or do you share the tasks when working on one of your books?

Dave: It varies a little book by book, but on a larger scale, Colin arranges all the conventions and any travel, etc. to foreign ones. I run the website, blogs, Twitter, Facebook group and email account. We both edit the anthologies and we both review and agree on future publications.

Colin: it is really a team effort, with Andy

Bloor working his wonders designing and formatting the books ready for printing and extra hands, such as my son Scott and Dave's daughter Jemma—or even your good self, Gary helping out behind the table at shows.

SP! Knowing you as I do, I know the convention circuit is important to Accent UK, but is it business-orientated first and foremost (i.e.: selling your books), or just an opportunity to meet up with some mates and drink some beers?

Dave: Hmmm... Well... it is of course all about the business... and meeting a lot of friends for a beer and the chance to talk comics. Really, though, it's about meeting readers and new customers. Getting the chance to talk to people about our books. I love looking at the table before the con starts with all the titles we have and the range of subjects we offer. For a small two-man outfit (albeit we get a lot of support from family members and people like Andy Bloor and you yourself), we haven't done too badly.

Colin: We get a real buzz from doing the shows, which are a great barometer for your books and seeing what other folks are up to. But while it's been great to see the UK scene develop, from those early solitary Bristol shows to the current crowded UK circuit, it does make it difficult to budget and get to

them all. This also means, sadly, that the old community spirit among creators has been diluted, as there's no longer one single UK show that you can guarantee that everyone will be at, which is a shame.

That said, we're having our busiest ever show year, with some ten or eleven events, including some four new shows this year alone, which is exciting—taking your books to a new audience—and hopefully bodes well for the future of the comics medium.

SP! What part(s) of producing your books do you like, and what part(s), if any, would you prefer the other to do?

Dave: Ha. I love writing and drawing. I love turning up at conventions, talking to people, and selling books. I'd be quite happy for Colin to do the rest.

Colin: Well, in an ideal world, I would enjoy doing the rest, but I'm with Dave: writing and drawing and selling at shows is the best, which means Dave and I have to fight over who does the other stuff, and I'm not saying who wins!

SP! Is there's any part of publishing your books which you both feel needs improving?

Dave: Promotion and publicity. We don't have the character to really push our books and there's so little time left after everything else. It is something that people tell us we need to improve and they are quite right. I just don't see us getting around to doing so in the near future; we're too busy creating.

Colin: We do find promotion tough and maybe we haven't made the most of the successes we have had, like when *Zombies* (2007) sold out, we decided not to reprint, fearful of being left with lots of stock.

With hindsight though, this was perhaps a mistake, as there was demand from distributors, stores and customers that we couldn't fulfill and the demand didn't simply transfer to our newer books, as we'd hoped—meaning we'd possibly failed to capitalise on our moment in the spotlight.

SP! So what's next? What can readers expect from Accent UK in the future?

Colin: There's quite a bit bubbling away in the background, including hopefully, a new book from Martin Flink of *Man of Glass* fame, an exciting adventure tale illustrated by a talented new American artist, a quirky medical comedy book (yes, really!), a war book, and, of course, the last of the anthology books, *Victoriana*, plus one or two surprises.

Dave: Well, I've always got more projects on the go than I can count and commit enough time to. I'm particularly excited by our longer running (and maybe even ongoing) stories. *WESTERNOIR* is great fun and will hopefully continue for a good while yet. I'm hoping that Stephenson's *Robot* starts up again soon, as Indio's art is awesome and his work deserves to be seen. I'm also working on a fantasy novel set on a different planet, with magic and monsters, but that's in early development. Marleen Lowe has completed illustration on our follow up to *Whatever Happened To The World's Fastest Man?*, which is called *Has Kane Mesmer Lost His Magic Touch?* Another book with a long title, which will hopefully see print in 2014. Apart from that, I've got a couple of my little hardcover efforts in various stages of development (*Strange Times Book 2* and the superhero project) and I'm really enjoying playing with collage art, so we'll no doubt see how I can drag that into the comic world.

SP! Thank you, gentlemen. And many thanks to Paul Birch for taking time out of his busy schedule to edit this interview.



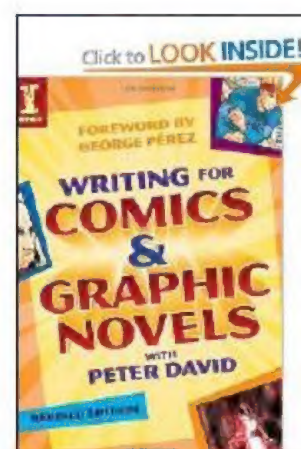
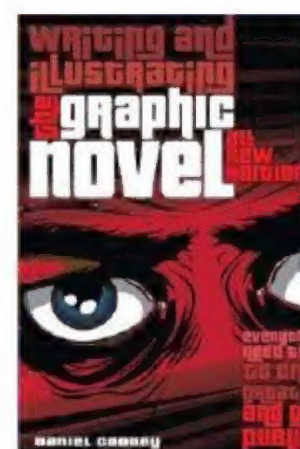
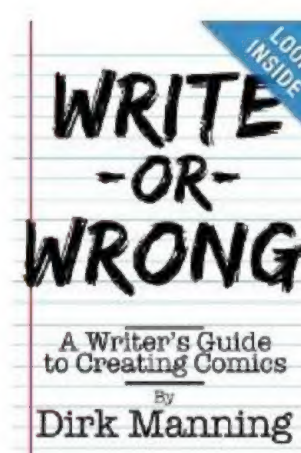
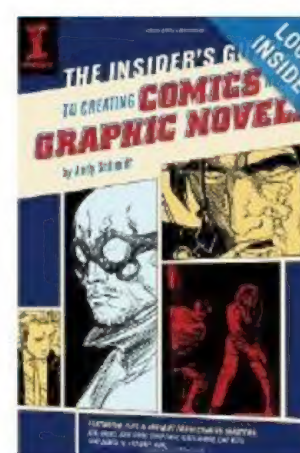
The Fish Bowl Chronicles



By Mark Turner

Before one can become a master crafter, they must first master the tools of their trade. For those who have considered writing comic books, it may seem as simple as picking up a pen or pencil and beginning the process of scripting. Well, one could very well dive in directly, but I propose to you that the master crafter also studies the art of their craft. Coming to the trade, as I did, from a foundation of screenwriting, there are many similar elements involved, but also many habits that I needed to unlearn to approach the craft effectively. So, where did I start? The internet is chock-full of all kinds of wonderful resources that the aspiring creator can look to for, not only inspiration, but practical methods of building from the ground up. Within this vast sea of knowledge on comic book creation, I have found the following websites/podcasts to be the most informative and useful (by no means does this mean that they are the only ones out there. They just happen to be the ones I've found the most useful to date in educating myself on how things work).

But, the fun doesn't end there. A good book with references, photos and insider insights is like a sledge hammer when it comes to knocking down the brick wall of cluelessness. I've slowly begun to build a bit of a library of books that are focused on creating comics and are useful tools in my quest for world domination. Following is a short list of some of the most useful:



USEFUL WEBSITES

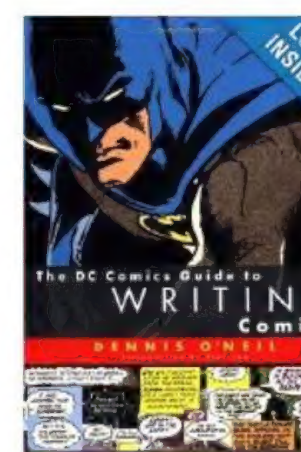
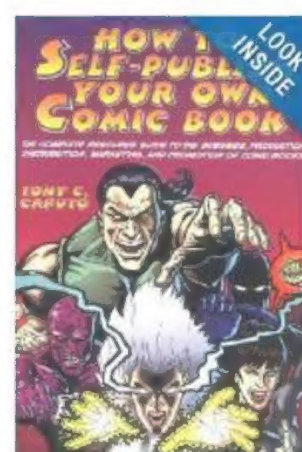
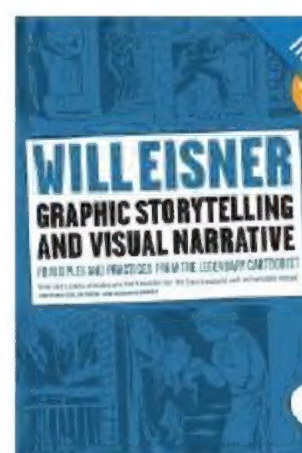
THE TWO BRANDONS ([HTTP://THE TWO BRANDONS.BUZZSPROUT.COM/10132](http://thetwobrands.buzzsprout.com/10132))

WRITING FOR ROOKIES ([HTTP://WRITINGFORROOKIES.PODCASTPEOPLE.COM/](http://writingforrookies.podcastpeople.com/))

MAKING COMICS ([HTTP://WWW.MAKINGCOMICS.COM/](http://www.makingcomics.com/))

MAKE IT AND TELL EVERYBODY ([HTTP://MAKEITTHETELLEVERYBODY.COM/](http://makeitthetelleverybody.com/))

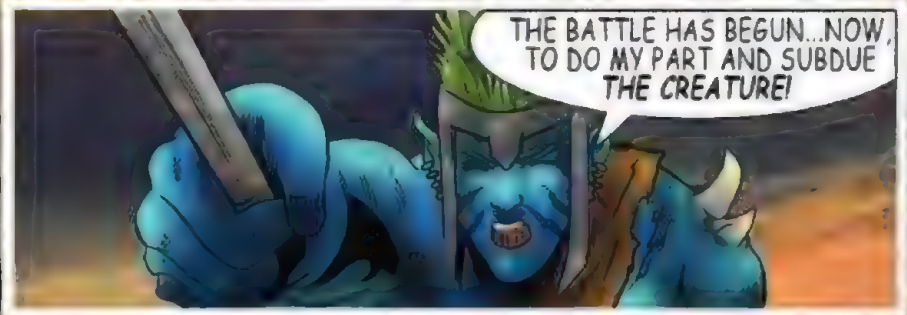
PAPER WINGS ([HTTP://WWW.PAPERWINGSPodcast.COM/](http://www.paperwingspodcast.com/))



However, in the end, the most important resources anyone entering the industry can have in their arsenal are the relationships that they cultivate as they build their project. Yes, it is important to put your head down and power through your work load at times... but art is not created in a vacuum. Relationships, both personal and professional inform your artistic vision. They give you the support you need to keep you grounded and focused when the daily grind starts to intrude on your endeavors. The individuals you have relationships with will be the ones who encourage you when you are handed defeat and who celebrate with you when you taste victory. So, as the work on the title continues to grow, I am learning to keep myself well-acquainted with the tools of the trade.



COME ON JINN...
WE HAVE TO
BREAK THROUGH!



THE BATTLE HAS BEGUN...NOW,
TO DO MY PART AND SUBDUE
THE CREATURE!



THE PIT
IS PACKED WITH SHAITANS!
THIS WILL NOT
BE EASY!

جنگ

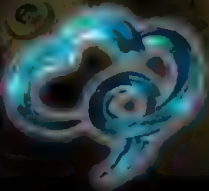
WARRIORS

BY MARWAN EL NASHAR

THIS GRIPPING 'REALITY-BASED FANTASY' IS BEST DESCRIBED AS LORD OF THE RINGS MEETS THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE. IT IS WHERE HISTORY, AS WELL AS FUTURE, ARE EXAMINED UNDER ISLAMIC AND BIBLICAL LIGHT, IN AN EFFORT TO COMPREHEND THE NATURE OF THE DEVIL, HIS MINIONS, AND PLANS FOR THE DEMISE OF HUMANITY.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT WE CAN DO TO SURVIVE, WIN, AND THRIVE...

COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY
TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS,
ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE



IF WE CAN JUST BREAK THEIR LINES...
THE BALANCE WILL GREATLY
TIP IN OUR FAVOUR!

SNEAK PEEK!

**SNEAK
PEEK!**

COME ON, MEN!
WE HAVE TO
BREAK THROUGH!

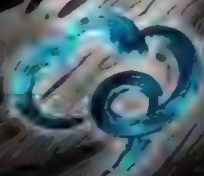
THE
BEACHFRONT
IS SO HEAVILY
FORTIFIED!

I'M HIT...
I'M HIT!

MEDIC!
WHERE'S THE
DOCTOR?

IF WE CAN
JUST BREACH THEIR FRONTLINE...
THIS BATTLE WILL BE WON!

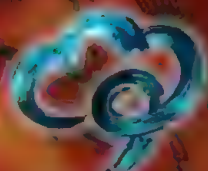
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TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS,
ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE



SNEAK PEEK!



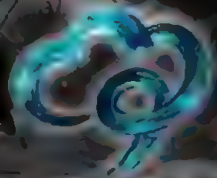
COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY
TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS,
ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE



**SNEAK
PEEK!**



COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY
TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS,
ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE



**SNEAK
PEEK!**



COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY
TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS,
ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

SNEAK PEEK!



LIKE AMEENA AND HAREDI BEFORE HIM,
HIS FIRST LEAP TO THE WORLDLY DIMENSION
IS INVOLUNTARILY...YET WITH PROFOUND
PURPOSE AND IMPECCABLE TIMING. *

WHAT ON
GOD'S EARTH
IS THAT?!!

WHERE
DID HE COME
FROM?

NO, WAIT...
HOLD YOUR FIRE!
HE'S ONLY
HOLDING A SWORD
AND OBVIOUSLY VERY
CONFUSED!

THOSE ARE
DAMN CRAZY NAZIS...
JUST SHOOT!

* JINN WARRIORS ISSUES 2 & 3



A WRITTEN VIEW

The First Five Pages

Regardless of what you do for a hook, the first five pages of your novel will tell a reader if they want to continue or not. You must be engaging, smart, crafty, clever, and above all, better than the other thousand books they are looking at on the shelf.

You don't have to give away everything in the first five pages. Setting the tone of the book is what you need to do. You'll need to determine the type of language to be used and map how people perceive each other. Is the world full of good guys looking to be better, or are they bad looking to be good? How do they interact with one another? Is the world in the future, the past, or just a flight of imagination? It is up to you to make sure the reader has a good idea.

I write Science Fiction and Fantasy, with a little action and suspense thrown in. For my last publication, *A Spear in Flight*, I set the stage by introducing the main character's mother as she is giving birth to him during a weeklong thunderstorm. The interplay between the characters tells you we have a mix of good and bad people, with a class of healers shrouded in mystery. The first chapter moves brutally fast into action and then pulls the reader to a climax, as a death occurs. Enter the main character and a prophecy of the future.

In my last short story, *Lonely* (the main character) is never fully introduced until the end. We live through his eyes, as he desperately looks to find company to spend time with. One member of my writing group did not see the end coming, but admitted I left many clues throughout the piece.

So, what am I getting at here? I am trying

to show you that it is important to make the reader want to read further into your piece. To get the store clerk to tell them to either put it down or pay for it. If you can get that to happen, you have a winner—and maybe, a best seller. At the very least, you will be able to pay for the lights that month.

But how do you do that? You make every chapter have someone who "wants" something. In every scene, they need to want it... because. You need to convey that want and put a conflict in place that will keep them from getting it. The girl or the guy is a good want, and consider why they want them. You can introduce the conflict of why they cannot have them by making them married, too young, too far away, of a different class, too poor, or too rich. These are the basics. Now, have the character want to overcome the differences through some means. It could be a treasure hunt to show they are brave, or a never ending battle to increase knowledge. Something. And, at the last part of the chapter, either have them ready to grasp it, or take it away from them. Regardless of what you do, remember to reintroduce the possibility in the next chapter, or they will wander around like the walking dead.

Remember to live the scenes through each character, using their eyes. Some of you are wondering why I say that. The reason is simple: it allows us to connect with the character and not forget the reason for reading. Keep the writing physical whenever possible. Nothing makes a reader sleep more than a recitation of facts to bring them up to speed about technology that does not exist. You need to feed it to them slowly, enticing them to read more as the plausibility increases.

As Margaret Atwood says, "Keep the writing physical." And, as I always say, "Engage your reader every chance you get."



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of the Odyssey crew
as they seek out a new home
for the people of Earth and
all the drama, fun
and adult stuff that happens
along the way...



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For Mature Audiences (18+)

Jim Scott



By Douglas Owen

I remember the first time I met Jim. He stood forebodingly in the hall of the Newmarket Community Centre. The members introduced us and he took me under his wing for the first meeting of the York Writers Community that I attended. You need to understand, I am not short, but Jim towered over me. This imposing Englishman gives off an aura of strength, intelligence, and gentleness that most people could only wish to emulate.

My assumption was he wrote fiction, probably crime or horror. Imagine my surprise when I found out he wrote travel memoirs and poetry. After talking with him for an hour, I found out he has had an amazing life. This gentle giant is a person everyone should know, for their life would be all the more better for it.

So, without delay, I would like to introduce you to Jim Scott.

SPI: JIM, PLEASE TELL THE READERS A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

school early. Signed on as apprentice in the British Merchant Navy aged 17 and kind of just kept on travelling the world. Wandered through 70-ish countries on five of the continents, crossing the three main oceans several times in between. Have never lived anywhere I planned to reach, always ending up doing so in places I hadn't intended to visit until just before I got there (Portugal, Gibraltar, South Africa, Rhodesia, British Virgin Islands, Canada... sojourned in several others for lesser periods). I recently achieved, for the first time in almost four decades, permanent immigration status in a land in which I reside. As far as I know, I have no vote anywhere in the world, unless possibly, the UK, for where I have no clue about their politics.

SPI: WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO WRITE A TRAVEL MEMOIR?

JS: Having lived through so many diverse experiences, like crossing the Atlantic under sail, working on African farms during insurgent war, going through several hur-

maternity clinic, I built up a wealth of fascinating and absolutely true after-dinner yarns to tell. It was because so many people would comment, "You know, you should really write a book," that one day, I decided I would. And so I did.

SPI: POETRY. I STILL HAVE A LITTLE DISBELIEF IN ME WHEN I LOOK AT YOU AND THINK, "HE WRITES POETRY." WHAT MADE YOU START WRITING POETRY?

JS: When I was quite a young lad, my father would recite some of the greats to me: Kipling, Wordsworth, Tennyson, etc. These touched something in my developing creativity that left a strong impression, especially Kipling's "Barrack Room Ballads," and one time, when I was crossing an empty ocean during my Merchant Navy years, pulling the graveyard watch as second mate, I tried my hand at writing similar, although instead of being about the common soldier, I wrote about the common sailor and used the vernacular they/we would use. In hindsight these early attempts weren't so good, but they were the kick-start of a pastime that I have loved practicing ever since. Mostly staying with lyrical verse, I find poetry to be a wonderful form of expressing myself on so many aspects of life, in a way that forces me to think in depth about every word I use.

SPI: TELL US ABOUT THE BOOKS YOU HAVE WRITTEN.



JS: Two published and one soon-to-be-published in the "Wanderings and Sojourns" series. Book One comprises 25 short (true... ish) stories from my experiences around the world and 25 poems. I say "true-ish" because some are amalgams, while others have been changed slightly to remove the need for lengthy introductions or explanations. The stories are not travelogues, though. I set the scene for each one with a foreword designed to put the reader into the context from which the story is told. At the end, I include a postscript written to encourage the reader to reflect on what happened in the story and consider what they might have done or felt, had it been them instead of me. And I never use names, not even mine, because there are real people involved. Book Two follows the same format, but is focused on just my seagoing and Caribbean years. That is the one to be published this year. Book Three, which was actually the first one to be published, comprises 80 poems covering all facets of life. It was the first to be published, because, basically, the contents were already written over the 40 years or

"I would suggest an emerging writer shop around and see what's out there. Certainly, don't jump at the first one, nor decide until you feel you have a handle on what sort of relationship you can develop with the publishing house."

JS: Born in England 60 years ago, raised in the Sussex countryside where was born the strong connection with nature that has sustained me ever since. Left

ricanes, being in Machu Picchu alone at dawn, being shipwrecked, diving for sunken treasure, filming TV episodes, even having my appendix out in a Caribbean

so I'd been writing poetry. I also have an illustrated children's book ready to be published, which is an extension of the last story in book one, and which I hope will be the first of a series of environmental books to help kids connect with the wonders of nature at an early age and grow with a mind open to environmental issues. I also have a large environmental novel finished in first draft, based upon some ancient Aboriginal philosophies and prophecies that, so far, have all been realized.

SP!: WHICH COUNTRY WOULD YOU SAY WAS THE MOST INTERESTING ONE YOU VISITED?

JS: Not an easy question to answer, as each has its own unique culture. One of the best attributes of "traveling" (as opposed to just being a tourist), and certainly something I have thoroughly embraced and enjoyed wherever I've been, is that you get to experience, and even share, different aspects of the different cultures to which you are exposed. This comes out strongly in many of the stories. If I had to pick, I think I'd go for a country that no longer exists as it was when I was there. It was then Rhodesia and is now Zimbabwe. I pick that one because, apart from the great beauty and diversity of the place and the people, I was fortunate to experience many unusual events that have never been replicated. True many of them were the result of the insurgent war that was raging at the time, but that just added another layer to the fascinating backdrop against which those experiences were lived and seemed to bring everything into much sharper focus.

SP!: DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY BOOKS YOU HAVE SOLD?

JS: The short answer is, "not enough!" A big part of self-publishing, of course, is self-marketing, and that is undoubtedly an area where I need to gain more skill and be able to exert more effort. That said, I'm heading toward 300 books in the different versions: hard and soft print, Amazon/Kindle, the various other e-formats, etc. But the bulk of the sales are paperback back copies self-sold at readings, and such.

SP!: HOW MANY READINGS DO YOU DO A YEAR?

JS: Same answer: "Not enough". Currently, I only do about a half dozen a year, but would like to ramp that up to possibly half that many each month. Problem there, of course, is there are only so many venues in the area, so I really do need to spread my wings more and seek out opportunities farther afield.

SP!: How long did it take you to write your first book?

JS: If we want to consider the poetry book, The Songs and Verses, that would be about 40 years, which is from when I started

writing poetry in earnest, but let's go with book one: On Five Continents and Three Oceans. That took about a year to write and about six months to polish and present for publishing. Keep in mind I have a daytime job, was a full time single dad during the period I produced that book, and in the months that permit it, I grow much of my own food, so time for writing is nowhere near as available as I would like.

SP!: Did anyone help you?

JS: In the writing process, no. I couldn't afford an editor (I strongly question whether anyone can edit poetry), but in the critiquing stages, I had friends and family who made valuable suggestions and observations, and of course, when it came to the publishing part, Friesen Press provided resources I was very happy to have available.

SP!: WOULD YOU SUGGEST USING FRIESEN PRESS TO AN EMERGING WRITER?

JS: I would suggest an emerging writer shop around and see what's out there. Certainly, don't jump at the first one, nor decide until you feel you have a handle on what sort of relationship you can develop with the publishing house. There are some out there who are going to publish your book no matter how bad (or good) it is, because their only interest is in selling you the package, not in your book sales. But that by no means describes them all, of course. You must keep in mind that the self-published writer is essentially driving their own business machine and cannot sit back and expect the books to sell themselves or the publishing house to do so for them. So it becomes imperative for the writer to pick the publisher he reckons will provide the most he needs to help him after the book is published, as well as during the publishing process—and that very much includes working collaboratively toward the best quality of all aspects of the product. A key consideration there is communication. Do you feel you can talk to them and that they will be openly talking to you in a collaborative way that will work to the benefit of that end result? Or are they just agreeing with whatever you are suggesting? With Friesen Press, I found something that I reckoned would work for me and I would most certainly suggest them as one of the publishers emerging writers might want to consider. But I reiterate that each writer should shop around and find the one that is going to work best for them.

SP!: WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE IF YOU WENT BACK IN TIME?

JS: I think I would have done it sooner, instead of waiting to be thoroughly convinced by others that I should. I would also, if means permitted, have endeavoured to learn more about the marketing aspect and developed a strategy ahead of time; perhaps enrolled in a course or two, for no matter how good the book, when it comes



to self-publishing it will not sell well unless you know how to sell it well.

SP!: WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF YOUR WRITING?

JS: Get the third Wanderings and Sojourns and the first children's book completed and out there. I want to bring the big environmental book to second-draft stage and then, hopefully, will be able to afford an editor to work with me from there. I am already starting to enter poetry competitions, as much to try to get my name circulating as to try to win anything. I'm also looking at a second book of songs and verses which, like the first one, is writing itself as I go. Long-term goal, as I move inexorably away from the wrong side of 60, is to establish the foundation for a writing career, albeit relatively low-key, that can help stimulate and sustain me intellectually, and perhaps a little financially, as I move into the netherworld of retirement.

SP!: CAN YOU GIVE US A SAMPLE OF YOUR WRITING STYLE WHEN IT COMES TO POETRY?

JS: Happy to. Here's one of my favourites that is well received at readings. It is very much autobiographical and, although written several years ago, resonates with me now, every bit as much as it did when I wrote it.

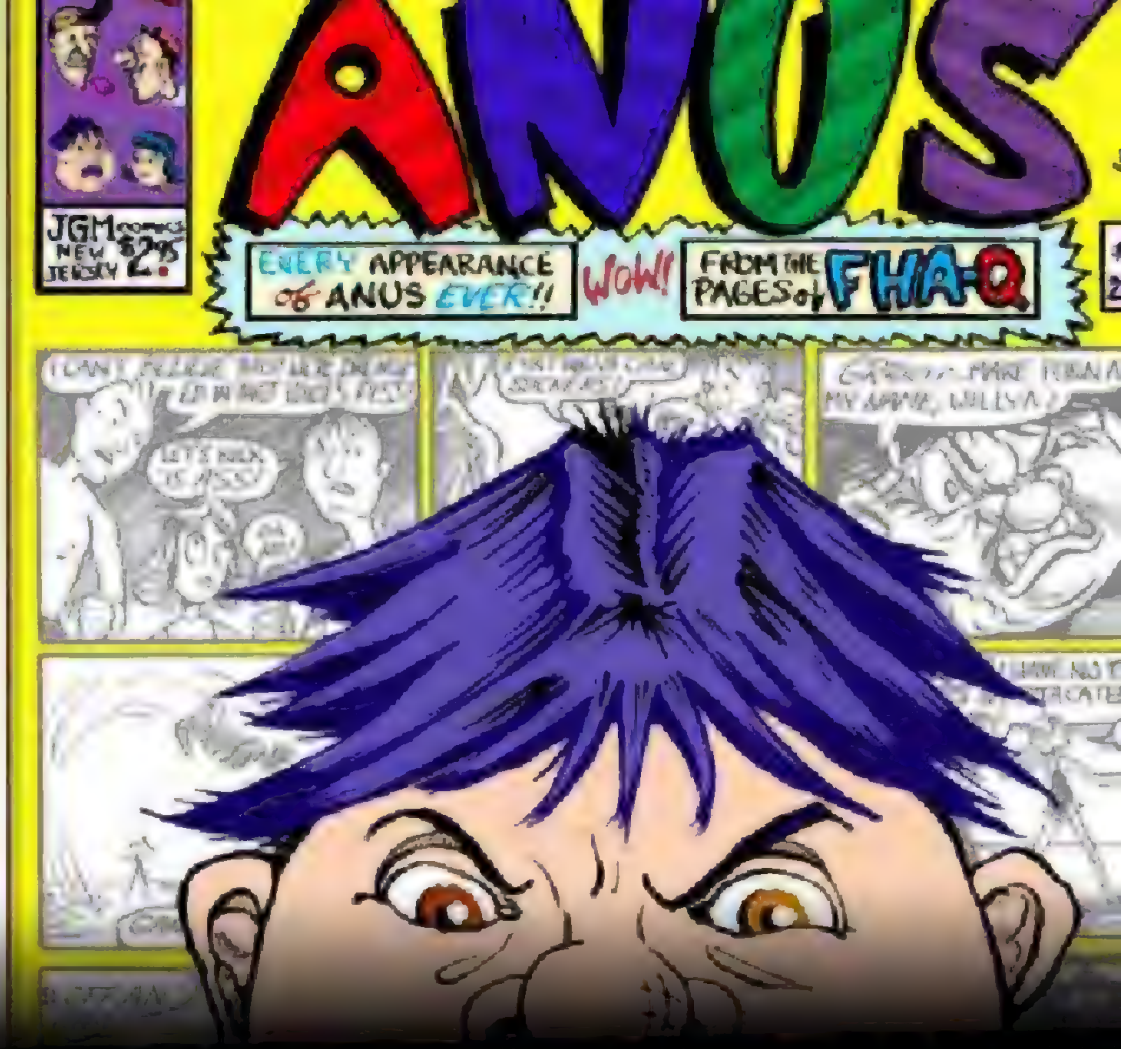
TOMORROW'S PAST LIFE

There was once a time when my life
was filled with living;
Adventure and excitement scattered
all across this earth.
I was in my prime, with so much just
ripe for giving.
To wander seemed the reason for my
birth.
But now my life has changed, I seldom
travel fifty mile.
Adventure's turned to mortgage.
Mine's a sedentary style.
My freedom's now an office, distant
romance an ex-wife.
I have to find the path that leads me

on to my old life!
So that just once more I can sail the
endless ocean,
Or track the old bull wildebeest, and
dive amongst the whales.
Watch the condors soar. Change my
plans on any notion
To seek of lands heard in a stranger's
tales.
Is that so very much to ask? I've known
it so before.
The hunger and the plenty, forest
snow and desert shore.
The laughter and the loneliness, the
passion and the pain.
But still there's lands I didn't see, and
those to see again.

If I'd find a way to undo these chains
that bind me,
Not harming those I love nor running
from the debts I owe.
I should leave today! Going where no
one could find me,
Not caring what I'd seek or where I'd
go.
But that's now how my dreams are
made; awake I see the truth:
The bank, the schools the eight to five,
all absent in my youth,
Now plot against my wanderlust, my
yearning for the road
To hide the path I'm seeking that I
once so freely strode.

But there'll come a time when the
house is bought and paid for,
The kids are all through college and
the pension's guaranteed.
Then I'll start to climb back toward
that life I'm made for;
My chains released, my spirit once
more freed.
Though twenty years may lay between
this moment and that day,
It waits on the horizon like a cairn
which points the way.
A monument to travelers; emancipa-
tion's prize!
A mark to set my compass bearing
steady in my eyes
So that I can see that my life is far from
finished.
And some day I will live again adven-
tures yet untold.
Where the wind and me, with a
passion undiminished,
Will find that younger life I knew of
old.



John Orlando

By Mark Turner

Beginning his career in 1994 as a penciling assistant to Rick Buckler at New York's Visage Studios, John Orlando has gone on to build for himself a CV that reflects the depth and breadth of his full talent. Writer, penciler, inker, colorist, letter, and painter, he is equipped to tackle creative projects in a number of capacities. Having just wrapped up work on four issues of F.H.A.-Q: America's Surreal-est Humor Magazine and three assignments before it: Splodenvolks (as writer, penciler, letterer, inker) a five page story for Dan Fogel's Hippy Comix,

and Stories #0, to be printed in October, colors by Rick Buckler Jr., Pencil/ Ink cover for British cartoonist Paul Steven Frosdick's, Dirty Bites Special Ed, full page penciler/ inker/ writer/ letterer/ colorist 'gag' panel in the book An Illustrative History in Profanity, and spearheading the Facebook group The NEW Underground Comix Publishers, Artists, and Writers Alliance (NUCPAWA), John Orlando posses a dizzying workload that he took a breather from to share his thoughts about his career, the industry, creative tools, and what is lined up next for this prolific creator.

artist (he was into intaglio). As far as formal training, I took a "Winterim" course at F.I.T. It was 4 1/2 hours a night for 2 1/2 weeks, equivalent to a semester, in life drawing. Informally, it was in Rich Buckler's studio where I really became a professional.

JO: Bill Elder, Matt Fox, Joe Maneely, Rich Buckler, Jack Kirby, and the Underground in general.

SP: WHAT IS ON THE HORIZON IN THE UPCOMING MONTHS?

SP: DO YOU CREATE YOUR WORK IN THE TRADITIONAL MANNER OR RELY ON DIGITAL TOOLS?

JO: Pencil, Hunts 102, Hunts 103, technical pens, colored India inks, for the most part, with a small amount of digital coloring or cut-and-paste here and there.

SP: IF YOU USE DIGITAL TOOLS TO CREATE YOUR IMAGES, WHAT TYPE OF SOFTWARE PACKAGES DO YOU UTILIZE?

JO: Photoshop.

SP: YOUR CREATIONS DEFINITELY LEAN TOWARDS THE SURREAL. WHAT TYPES OF CHALLENGES DOES THE SURREALIST APPROACH POSE WHEN CRAFTING A STORY?

JO: Clearing the mind to allow the subconscious through without bias or second-guessing.

SP: ANY INFLUENCES THAT HELPED YOU DEVELOP YOUR "VOICE" AS A CREATOR?

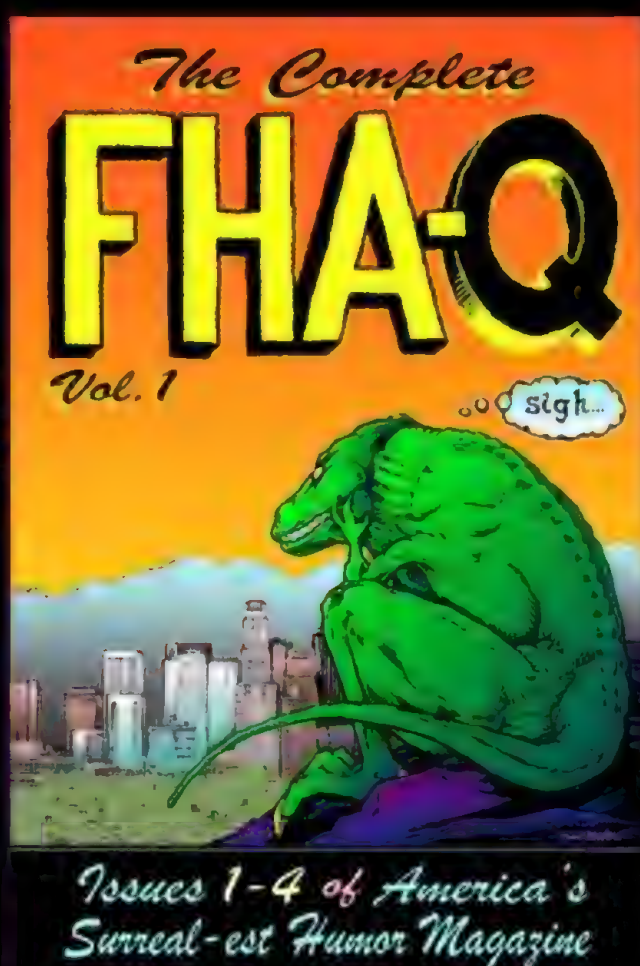
JO: I will be inking a cover soon for Jim Stewart's book Ganjaman, over Rick Buckler Jr's pencils. That's pretty exciting, as we've worked as a team in the 90s—but with his inks over my pencils; a little role-reversal here—as well as some work with Rick Jr's insane Underground anti-hero Night Devil. The Complete F.H.A.-Q, Volume 1 trade paperback will be out as a co-publishing effort from JGM Comics' Joe Martino

SP: IN TERMS OF COMIC BOOK CREATION, YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO WORK IN A NUMBER OF CAPACITIES ON A PROJECT (WHETHER AS A WRITER OR LETTERER, ETC) IS THERE ONE ASPECT THAT YOU IDENTIFY MORE WITH/ENJOY MORE THAN ANY OTHER?

JO: Plotting and layout are probably my favorites. After that, I like playing with words in the scripting.

SP: DO YOU HAVE ANY FORMAL TRAINING IN TERMS OF YOUR ART OR ARE YOU SELF-TAUGHT?

JO: My mother was one of the first graduates at F.I.T., so I would pick her brain and watch her when I was as young as four years old. My father was also an





and Hippy Comix' Dan Fogel. It compiles the complete content of Issues 1-4 as well as some extra goodies, such as a Forward by comics legend Rich Buckler, an intro by Underground maven Dan Fogel, and an afterward by long-time indie publisher Joe Martino. Besides that, I'll be promoting and supporting all of my good friends and colleagues in my Facebook group, The NEW Underground Comix Publishers, Writers, and Artists Alliance.

SPI: YOU HAVE AN ONSLAUGHT OF PROJECTS COMING OUT. WHAT TOOLS DO YOU FIND TO BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE IN REACHING AN AUDIENCE?

JO: The friends and colleagues I've met through my New Underground group have been an awesome and supportive word-of-mouth network; there's no competition there and we all share out each other's links and promo material. (Positivity ripples out from this crew!)

SPI: HOW DO YOU FIND AN AUDIENCE IN A FIELD THAT IS SO PACKED WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONTENT?

JO: Lots of patience, internet presence, and trial-and-error.

SPI: WHERE ARE THE BEST PLACES FANS CAN FIND YOUR WORK?

JO: The newer stuff that's available can be found at Joe Martino's site, www.jgm-comics.com, and I have a few books over at Kathe Todd's site www.ripoffpress.com. Older books can be found at various mail-order houses such as Mile High Comics. (For a fairly comprehensive list of my print history, see my Facebook page www.facebook.com/JohnOrlandoArtist)

For those looking to get their hands on some well executed surrealist comic book storytelling, John Orlando is well worth checking out.



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Mark Egan



Amy Letts interviews Mark Egan about RAWRtacular publishing and its manga-style webcomics.

SP!: What are your comics *Back Office* and *Bata Neart* about?

ME: *Back Office* is my comic take on the horror that is call center work. I originally conceived the comic while working in the call center of a certain British telecom company, and a lot of what you would see in the comic comes from those experiences. *Back Office* follows the trials and tribulations of two young call agents named Mike and Karen who, along with the normal, mundane, day-to-day office life, must also deal with demonic team leaders, vengeful maniacal customers, and insane computer monsters who threaten to take over the world. All this, while being paid minimum wage.

As well as that, there is the older of my two comics, *Bata Neart*. It's my take on the whole 'Magical Girl' manga sub-genre, set in a coastal Irish town and featuring a cast of Irish teenagers. The story centers on one teenaged girl named Ashling, whose otherwise normal life is thrown into turmoil when an ancient Celtic weapon falls into it. Ashling now struggles to hold onto her old life, and her sanity, while being backed up by her friends. Danger, drama, and comedy ensue during her various adventures across the mysterious Wicklow Mountains.

And that's the two comics in a nutshell :D.

SP!: What made you want to create comics specifically?

ME: I've been cartooning in some shape or form since I was very small, but I think I only started getting 'serious' into comic creation in my very late teens. By then, I had started a serious 'love' stage in my long-running love/hate relationship with anime and after consulting some tutorials in the world wide web (that's what we had in the late 90s, before this 'internet' thing came along), I started to learn how to draw anime/manga characters.

For the first time in my drawing life, characters were starting to turn out as I intended, and so I stuck to the whole anime/manga genre, which I have continued to this very day.

Back then (and even now, to a smaller degree), I harbored delusions of improving to the degree that I could actually produce anime. Although, at that stage, I lacked colorists, in-betweeners, producers, voice actors, and sound engineers... and I didn't live in Japan... and I wasn't all that good at drawing either... :D But since all I could do was draw, I began to draw down the scenes I imagined in my mind and turned them into my first comics. This continued for

over ten years, until I got to where I am now, with two webcomics updating weekly.

SP!: Nowadays how do you make a living? Off of comics or call centers?

ME: Thankfully, I left my call center days behind me a loooooong while ago, but unfortunately, I do not make a living from the comics. In fact, it costs me more to run the website than I make with them currently. At the moment, I work as an IT Consultant in Oslo, Norway; which is where I moved in 2008—just before the recent recession hit my native Ireland. Thankfully, the Norwegians appear to be strong believers in free time, and as a result, I get (just) enough to keep doing my non-paying comic job.

SP!: What type of person should read your comics?

ME: Hmm... good question. Thing is, it seems that both my comics have very different reader sets, which kind of surprised me. If you want to enjoy *Back Office*, I guess you'd need to be into oddball humor and also a bit of sci-fi. I like to think that being into the likes of *Dilbert* isn't necessary to enjoy this office comedy, but I think it does help.

Bata Neart goes a little more into serious drama territory, but still tries to be funny and light-hearted. If you are the kind of person who enjoys the whole magical-girl sub-genre of anime/manga, you might like *Bata Neart*. Later on, there will be more focus on mystery, magic, and even politics; so later on, I think there will be more to offer in this comic.

SP!: What have you done to promote your comics? What's worked best?

ME: I've tried *everything* on the prescribed webcomic promotion list. I'm on all sorts of social media; I've done link exchanges, collaboration works, competitions, advert campaigns, and the comics are listed on nearly every webcomic listing out there. Can't really say that any of them have worked all that much, as my readership tends to stay frustratingly low.

I'm still working on finding that long-fabled 'winning formula' of webcomic promotion that will get me thousands of unique readers a day, like the heavyweight webcomics out there.

So far, targeted advertising campaigns with Project Wonderful—on weeks where I've actually drawn a good page—seem to pull in readers. That has worked best so far.

I'm still working on improving my core of regular readers and I guess that is just going to take more time, effort and guess-work to attract them over to my comics.

SP!: What have been the most momentous events that occurred in your comics?

ME: Within the comics themselves, there have been a couple of major events. The end of the *Q-Matic* story in *Back Office* was a big one, as that story took nearly three years to draw (and still accounts for the vast bulk of *Back Office's* archive). The re-launch of *Bata Neart* was another big event. I've spent nearly ten years drawing and re-drawing that one, and it wasn't until about a year and half ago that I began releasing it as a regular webcomic.

Beyond the comics, the other big event that I still feel very good about was the review I received from *Deconstructing Comics* for *Back Office*. They gave it an unbelievably good review, which shocked me, as those guys are usually very tough critics. That event gave me the confidence to believe that other people actually like what I produce and that I was doing an OK job. I hadn't felt that way about my comics before.

SP!: Have your adventures while travelling affected you creatively?

ME: Oh god yes. For example, I spent one summer working as a 'battle' extra for a movie called *King Arthur* (it appears that my ridiculously long man-hair made me look like a Saxon and got me the job!) The movie was terrible, myself and the other extras even knew it would be while we were fighting each other with fake rubber swords, but from that I took away a unique view of large battles. Not long after that, I worked this into the very first pages of *Bata Neart*, which was a very *King Arthurish* large set-battle. Even later in *Back Office*, there's a scene where Mike and an army of video-game 'baddies' face off against *Q-Matic's* army. That's also taken directly from my experiences on that movie.

Later on, I travelled a good bit more. I lived in China for a while as an English teacher and I think the place did have a serious effect on my creativity. Although not the same as Japan by a long shot, China had a feel to the place that made it somewhat similar. I think that helped me calm down a bit with the whole anime/manga thing. I had been overly excited by it for years and my spell in China had helped make the places described in the comics and anime I enjoy seem more 'normal,' if that makes any sense. So, I calmed down and I think that helped my art quite a bit.

I also think my time in China helped develop my sense of humor. I lived in a small rural city of only one million people (that's apparently small there), where I was one of only twelve foreigners. So daily life was... interesting for me. Also, I found the Chinese to be wonderfully dysfunctional... It was almost like living in Diskworld's Ankh-Morpork. So, to cope with life there, I think I developed my current oddball sense of humor. I looked on the funny side of everything I saw, and started to even rename places that I thought were funny as hell. A lot of early Bata Neart pages were drawn during my time there.

Finally, I did move to Norway and my time working in offices here gave me plenty to story ideas to write up the first few Back Office pages. By then, I think a lot of my more extreme adventures had come to an end, so not long after moving here, I started into launching RAWRtacular and getting seriously into the comic work. Which is what I've been trying to do ever since.

SP!: I couldn't help noticing you are a gamer! What are your favourite games?

ME: I am a gamer of the Old School (wherever the hell that place is), and my most active gaming days were back in the 90s, when I was jumping between Gameboy and Sega MegaDrive (or Genesis as some may know it). I was mostly into the Sonic series and I followed that right up until the end of the MegaDrive's production life. I kept gaming into my late teens with Playstation and some early PC gaming thrown in there too. For that era, I mostly followed the GTA series of games and other sandbox titles, as well as the later Final Fantasy series, in particular, FFXIII (which I think has something to do with my switch to Anime/Manga). After college I started getting into more RTS games like Age of Empires and the original StarCraft (played a *lot* of that in Chinese net cafés!).

Later on, after I started cartooning, I kind of stopped gaming. This is mostly due to lack of time, as I would love to spend plenty of time gaming. Problem is, I would feel too guilty for using my free time for non-comic activities. Alas, that's the price I pay for doing this gig :D

SP!: You say in your blog that you started RAWRtacular because you wanted to achieve 'something' before your 30th Birthday. What do you plan to achieve before you turn 40? Dream big!

ME: Well, I harbor one fantasy that has followed me throughout the past ten years, and will probably stick to me until I do something about it. I have always wanted to animate Bata Neart into an anime-style cartoon. I usually have this in mind when I create content for that comic. The

next step forward for myself and RAWRtacular (which really is just me right now) is to eventually expand into animation production and become a sort of 'micro-studio'. After I finish the first Back Office book, I'm hoping to begin practicing this to create animated adverts for the comics. Hope to pull off something with that by 40. I also hope to have at least several volumes of Back Office and Bata Neart published and in comic book shops by then. I'm also hoping that people will like them :D.

SP!: Okay this is the last question and it isn't really a question. This is open mic—your chance to say anything else you want to say about 'RAWR Comics'.

ME: Well... what can I really say? It's kind of hard to put what doing comics means to me in words, but I will try. The RAWRtacular Comics are both the sum total of my adult life so far, as well as all of the creativity and stories I have longed to express for such a long time. It means an awful lot to me that we now live in a world where it is possible for an amateur like myself to produce a comic and then push it out for the world to read. The past three years of web-cartooning have been the most rewarding for me creatively and I hope to see that grow with time. Thanks to webcomics, I have made many connections and friends that I would not have thought possible a mere ten to fifteen years ago, and I am glad for it.

I am also a strong believer that Webcomics are an important step forward in bringing creative expression to everyone. If someone has a story to tell, a picture to paint, or a song to sing, I believe that that person has the right to share it with everyone, without being halted by the various entertainment industry cliques that would have stood in that person's way before. We live in a world of social media now, and although it has brought many unfortunate and annoying things, it has at least leveled the playing field for content creators such as web-cartoonists.

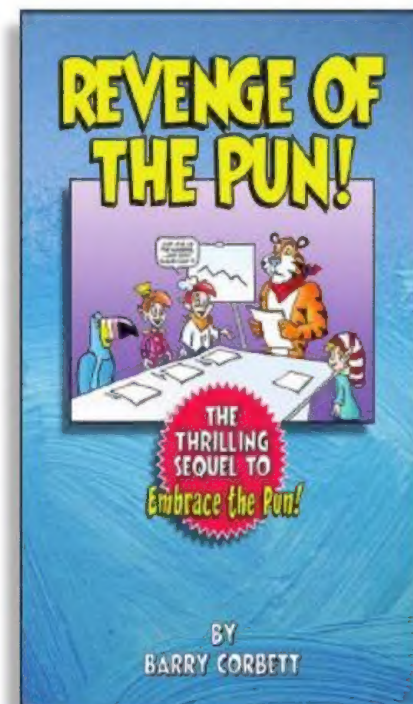
I think the future of entertainment will be interesting, and I think what we're doing here is part of what it will become. I would like to finish by saying thank you to anyone who reads this, and thank you to all of the readers and fellow web-cartoonists I know. You are what makes this fun :D.

Thank you for the interview Mark and good luck with 'Back Office' and 'Bata Neart'

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